DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 609 EA 028 659

TITLE	Transforming the Education System: The 1997 Education Agenda.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
PUB DATE	1997-07-00
NOTE	22p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427 (Publication No. GP-97-1).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; Accountability; Brain; *Educational Change; *Educational Improvement; Educational Innovation; Educational Technology; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Governance; Performance
IDENTIFIERS	*Education Commission of the States

ABSTRACT

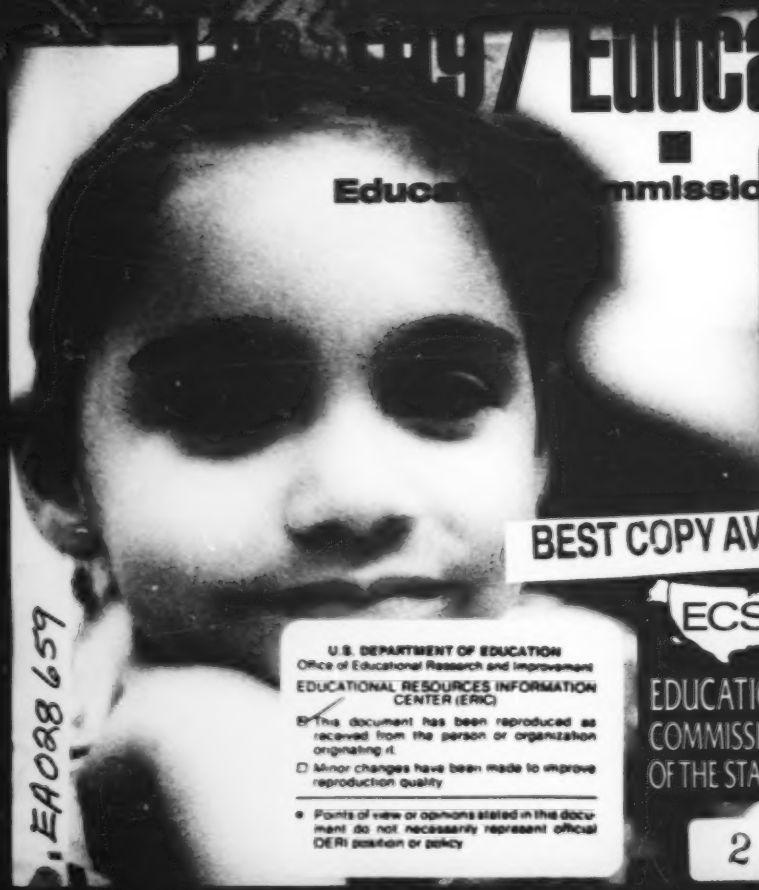
Improvement efforts in American education must be supported and sustained. The 1997 "Education Agenda" identifies the Education Commission of the States' priorities for 1997-98 and describes the broader context within which education systems exist. It provides an overview of the following transformational forces in education: the impacts of brain research, technology, the implementation of academic standards and assessments, new approaches to school governance, demands for performance, alternatives to public schools, and the changing nature of "the learner." A list of ECS priorities is included. The enclosed 1996-97 "Highlights" summarizes ESC's accomplishments and briefly reviews its financial status. The "Highlights" points out that ECS significantly strengthened service in two areas--the provision of technical assistance and accountability to constituents. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 411 609

Educat

Educa mmissio



BEST COPY AVAILABL

EA028 659

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ECS
EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

2

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. F. Walker

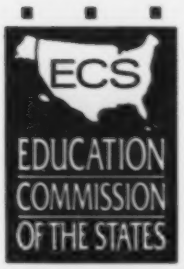
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The mission of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) is to help state develop and carry out policies to improve performance of the education system as reflected in increased learning by all citizens.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TRANSFORMING
THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
The 1997 Education Agenda

Education Commission of the States



707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, Colorado 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
http://www.ecs.org

POLICY AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE

Paul Patton, Governor, Kentucky, Chairman

Jacquelyn Belcher, President, DeKalb College, Georgia

Chuck Berry, State Representative and Speaker of the House, Colorado

Jodie Butler, Assistant to the Governor, Iowa (*ex officio*)

Cynthia Chestnut, State Representative, Florida

Mary Lou Cowlishaw, State Representative, Illinois

Mike Fox, State Representative, Ohio

Hillman Terome Frazier, State Senator, Mississippi

Herbert J. Grover, Professor, Department of Education, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

Barbara A. Hoffman, State Senator, Maryland

R. Jan LeCroy, President, Dallas Citizens Council, Texas

Jon E. Litscher, Department Secretary, State Department of Employment Relations, Wisconsin

Robert J. McLendon, State Representative, Arizona

Mike Moses, Commissioner of Education, Texas Education Agency

Lawrence Pogemiller, State Senator, Minnesota

Stephen R. Portch, Chancellor, University System of Georgia

Elaine Scott, Arkansas State Board of Education

Stephen Stoll, State Representative, Missouri (liaison, National Conference of State Legislatures, *ex officio*)

Kevin B. Sullivan, State Senator, Connecticut

David Watts, Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Georgia (*ex officio*)

TRANSFORMING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM:
The 1997 Education Agenda

Across the country, concerned people are contemplating the future of American public education. In conferences and corridor conversations; in governors' offices, legislatures, government agencies and board meetings; in think tanks, professional groups, corporate board rooms and community organizations; at the union meeting, the PTA and the dinner table, Americans talk, debate and worry aloud. Their concerns are diverse, as are their ways of expressing them. While they have diverging interests, they also share common ground. Their questions are serious and wide-ranging:

- Are schools and campuses safe?
- Are students learning what they need to know to be successful?
- How will we pay for college? Who gets to go?
- What is the cost of an "adequate" education? How much does money matter?
- How will we ever achieve equity in education funding?
- Are schools and colleges getting better? Getting worse?
- Who is accountable for what? Where is the evidence of results? What are the incentives for performance?
- Will there be jobs for graduates? Will graduates be prepared for the jobs that are there?
- How can we increase parents' involvement in their children's education? How can *I* make a difference?
- Is the public system capable of making needed improvements? Or do we need private-sector solutions?
- Can we fix schools without fixing communities?
- Is there a public for public education?

Improvement efforts continue, sustained by the commitment and dogged determination of education leaders, elected officials, professionals and ordinary citizens. They accelerate — buoyed by inspirational leadership, focused investment, staying power and stunning successes (even if still marginal); and they flag — derailed by turfdom, turnover, ideological disputes and disappointing results in the early returns. But these efforts continue because, we still believe, they *must*. The future of our young people and of our society is at stake.

The stakes are so high, in fact, that many people have come to question whether current reform efforts are adequate to the task. The pace of change too often appears glacial, the tools too primitive, the incentives unclear, the will too weak. And so frustration grows. Fueled by deeply held values, by political ideology and by desperation, impatience becomes the mother of invention.

One need not look far to see the dust being kicked up across the landscape of the education system. Teachers and parents are leaving the traditional system to establish charter schools. Voucher experiments have been launched in several locations, and home schooling is on the rise. Western governors have banded together to launch a "virtual university." Legislatures have authorized the takeover and/or complete reorganization of major urban school districts. School boards have contracted with private and profit-making organizations for the management of districts. State leaders are taking an activist interest in the organization and performance of their states' postsecondary education systems. Software technologies are making it possible to track uses of education funds and productivity of teachers in ways not previously possible. And the list goes on, so that even the casual observer can see things happening that hardly would have been contemplated just a few years ago.

As remarkable as these developments may be, chances are that they are mere harbingers of things yet to come — the early manifestations of forces whose impacts on the education system as we have known it may be truly transformational. Following is a brief look at some of those forces.

Understanding How and When Children Learn: The Impacts of Brain Research

The good news is that discussion about the emerging findings of brain research seems to be a new national pastime. News magazines and major dailies, television networks and popular books, governors' meetings and a White House conference have immersed people in exciting new information about *how intellectual capacity develops — or fails to develop — during the earliest years of life.* Here are some highlights:

- Contrary to widely held views, infants are not born with their brains and central nervous systems "hard-wired," nor is a child's intelligence a pre-set quotient fixed at some point on a bell-shaped curve. About one-third of the wiring of the brain is completed by birth. Each infant has a huge number of *potential* synapses (brain connections) that can be formed after birth for language acquisition, vision, feeling and so on. Genetics are important, but experiences determine the formation and scope of the brain and the central nervous system. Says Ronald Kotulak, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Inside the Brain*, "Genes . . . establish the framework of the brain, but then the environment takes over . . . ."

- Stimulation is essential. The more stimulation an infant experiences, the more brain connections are made. A rich environment, in which parents and others are talking, reading and singing to the infant, produces a major positive effect on the child's intellectual capacity. Improvements of 10 or even 20 IQ points are possible.

- Early experience matters the most. One can always learn to use the brain better, but with advancing age, new connections are harder and harder to make. By age 6 months, the opportunity for making some brain connections has passed. Age 3 or 4 is late for many things, including the connections used in language acquisition. The synapses for vision develop very early, and once the window of opportunity is past, they cannot be connected. "Use it or lose it" is a maxim that clearly applies to the early development of certain critical brain functions.

- External influences also can damage the brain and central nervous system in their early development, thereby reducing the infant's intellectual capacity. In pregnancy, these damaging factors include smoking, drugs, alcohol and pre-term birth. In early infancy, they include lead poisoning, malnutrition and child abuse. Results may include loss of 10-12 IQ points in otherwise normal infants and substantially greater losses in infants with serious disabilities such as fetal alcohol syndrome. The compelling observation here is that these effects are *preventable*.

- Potentially the most important finding is that scientists have learned a great deal and still see much to learn from brain scans that diagnose brain malfunctioning associated with problems such as dyslexia. New modes of treatment for such conditions will offer the opportunity to avoid learning disabilities by taking action during the first years of life.

- In preliminary research, scientists are now identifying the *type* of intelligence being used by a child to solve problems. Over the next decade, they may be able to suggest techniques to help students learn by using multiple types of intelligence.

To a certain extent, it could be argued, as Joe Klein did in the March 1997 issue of *The New Yorker,* that these studies ". . . proved, with scientific precision, most everything your grandmother assumed to be true about child-rearing: that it's crucial for babies to be hugged, talked to, sung to, read to and adored. Those who don't get the physical attention suffer; those who are abused or neglected can be physiologically damaged for life."

But there are also in these findings crucial and potentially controversial implications for public policy and education. Among the issues that policy leaders likely will need to address, for example, are the following:

- Support for programs to prevent intellectual damage to infants

- Support for programs to educate parents, to provide a healthy start for children and to promote parental involvement in education

- Improvements in the quality of day care and early childhood education programs

- Decisions about the relative value of investment in the early years vs. the later years of education — and even about investment in education for 3- or 4-year-olds vs. investment during the first year of life

- Consideration of significant change in the approach to special education, with a potentially far greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention

- Changes in state organization and governance to bring education, health, and human services together under a common structure.

Transformational Effects of Technology

No longer is there great revelation in a pronouncement that technology and its dizzying advances pervade our lives and work and increasingly will do so in the future. Indeed, sizable numbers of people devote expanding chunks of their personal and professional time to decisions about technology: how to choose it, buy it, deploy it, install it, maintain it, build an infrastructure to support it. Then comes learning to use it and, for a smaller number of us, actually understanding it. These are important issues for political leaders and educators, involving massive investments of public dollars and cutting across the boundaries of geography, of public/private enterprise, of government agencies and education sectors.

What may be lost in these daily preoccupations, however, is the opportunity to consider the larger picture — the truly *transformational* effects of technology on our society and our education systems. While some of these effects still may be only imagined by futurists and technology experts, many of them are evident now, and early indications compellingly suggest they will call into question some of our most basic assumptions about education. Consider the following:

- Author Jeremy Rifkin, in *The End of Work*, examines the technological innovations that are moving us to the edge of what he calls "a near workerless world." In the foreword to the book, Robert Heilbroner (author of *Visions of the Future)* observes that "between 1960 and 1990, output of manufactured goods of all kinds continued to rise, but the number of jobs needed to create that flow of production fell by half" as jobs were taken over by machines. And Rifkin predicts that as we move into the next century, millions of people will find themselves without jobs, many of them victims of a technological revolution that is replacing human beings with machines at a rapid rate in virtually every sector and industry of the global economy.

  Already the effects are dramatic. According to a 1995 survey of 2,000 corporate executives from the world's leading

industrial nations, "94% of the respondents reported that their companies had been through a reorganization in the past two years, resulting in a permanent reduction in their workforce." From the agricultural industry comes an amazing fact: there are now more employees in the U.S. Department of Agriculture than there are farmers in America. Downsizing in the public sector has come later but is similarly significant in its impact.

What all of this means is not only that the nature of work, the meaning of jobs and the necessary preparation for them are all changing. It means also that in a society where an individual's identity and sense of worth have long been tied to the market value of his or her labor, we are going to be forced to rethink some basic propositions. As Rifkin concludes, "redefining opportunities and responsibilities for millions of people in a society absent of mass formal employment is likely to be the single most pressing social issue of the coming century."

- Perhaps the most obvious effect of technology on education is the increasing extent to which it renders both time and place irrelevant. What is the meaning of "classroom" when a student anywhere in America or the world can log on or tune in at any time of the day or night and interact in real time or asynchronous time with experts and fellow students across the room, down the hall or half a world away?

- Closely related and just as powerful is the matter of technological access to information. Textbooks and even libraries become artifacts of the past as capacity is developed for electronic transmission of text, data, visual images and audio messages over the Internet and other data networks. Moreover, the ability of learners to access that information directly and instantaneously changes forever the role of teachers and faculty members. The model of "teacher" as a single individual standing at the front of a classroom dispensing information has not, from a pedagogical standpoint, been particularly effective, even in the past. It becomes increasingly infeasible and unaffordable for the future. New roles for teachers, new approaches to teacher preparation and new staffing patterns for schools and colleges seem inevitable.

- All of these forces together are blurring the boundaries to which educators, policymakers and the public long have been accustomed. With advanced-placement courses being widely taught by university faculty through distance-learning technologies, who is the university student and who the high school student? With electronic courses being offered at community colleges for credit toward a bachelor's degree, who is the community college student and who the university student? With the integration of classrooms

and worksites, who is the worker and who the student? With the advent of electronic community colleges and virtual universities, who is the regional accreditor and what gets accredited? What is the meaning of school district boundaries, of community college service areas, of state lines and international borders? What is the rationale for out-of-state tuition? What about state licensing of institutions and state certification of educators? As electronic student portfolios are more widely used, what are the implications for grading systems, admissions processes, articulation and transfer?

The issues of coordination are monumentally complex, especially when one considers the current state of the art. As one higher education administrator ruefully observed, "We can't even get coordination among the four campuses of our own university."

Ultimately, the most powerful effect of technology on education likely will be the possibilities created for entirely new kinds of learning. Clues to those possibilities presently are seen more often in amusement parks than in classrooms — an array of "virtual" experiences that put the ticketholder in the passenger seat of a spacecraft, in a balloon over the rainforest or as a point guard in the NBA. Virtual experiences give a whole new meaning to the phrase "learning by doing" — and they serve as only one example of the kinds of technological tools that will be available. Clearly, the promise of technology will remain significantly unfulfilled if its primary uses are confined to sending all the old kinds of stuff over wire and cable and satellite signal.

Implementation of Academic Standards and Assessments

The past decade of work on education reform has featured prominently the development of new standards for student learning and assessments for ascertaining the extent to which those standards are achieved. The political road often has been rocky, but at last count, 44 states had implemented or were in the process of developing such standards at the elementary and secondary school levels; additionally, in some places standards have been developed locally. A much smaller number of states have instituted common assessments in higher education. The work of developing standards and assessments, though important and certainly unfinished, is no longer news. The critical question is whether the work will be sustained, and the critical moments may well be the ones that follow public announcements of the results of early assessments.

Unfortunately, but also predictably, in state after state, the reports document student performance that is lower than we hoped for and far lower than we need. As ECS Senior Fellow Chris Pipho reports in the May 1997 *Phi Delta Kappan*, "every state that has

initiated a high school graduation test in grades 8 or 9 has reported an initial failure rate of approximately 30%." That is the record of the past, and the pattern is holding. Front-page stories in Minnesota report that 41% of the state's 8th graders flunked a basic skills test in reading, while 30% failed a similar test in math. Maryland reeled last year when it was reported that student achievement in the Baltimore City Schools had hit an alarming low: 13.1% of 3rd graders, 10.3% of 5th graders and only 7.6% of 8th graders were able to read at the excellent or satisfactory level on the state's performance assessment.

Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) bring little consolation. The 1994 NAEP reading results, released in 1995, show that among 4th graders tested, 7% performed at the "advanced" level, 23% at "proficient" and 30% at "basic," with the remaining 40% essentially semi-literate. Recent results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study are mixed: While 4th-grade achievement is moving closer to the goal of "first in the world," American 8th graders are posting performance far from that mark. Within postsecondary education, statewide testing (in Florida and Texas, for example) has produced mounting concern about the performance of public schools, the adequacy of remedial education, the quality of college-level instruction and the disproportionate impact of high-stakes tests on minority student populations.

It is important to note that researchers and educators who closely examine test results and trends can find reasons for hope, both in test scores that creep up and in reduced discrepancies between the performance of minority students and that of their non-minority peers. But the political reality is that disappointing results prompt an array of reactions on the part of politicians, educators — and especially the public.

The reactions vary greatly: "Blame the test!" "Close the school!" "Hire a general!" "Ditch the system!" And some of the reactions, if sustained long enough and powerfully enough to gain political sway, may substantially affect the future of public education. Reactions born of frustration and even outrage may produce bad public policy; alternatively, they may produce opportunities for innovation not previously possible. The potential consequences may include the following:

- Retreat from the standards and/or the assessments — such a retreat may variously reflect a regrouping of the forces of earlier political opposition, genuine concern about the nature of the standards or the quality of the assessment instruments, a simple decision that we do not really want to know what's going on out there or all three
- Continued commitment to standards and assessments, but accompanied by significantly strengthened accountability systems, including incentives for high performance and sanctions for poor performance

- Proposals for takeover or dramatic reorganization of schools, districts or colleges
- Serious escalation in the demand for alternatives to the public schools, as reflected in charter schools, vouchers, home schooling and the like
- Renewed calls for more money for poor-performing schools.

These consequences are indicated not just through speculation but also through recent experience. When they occur in isolation, they may be observed as interesting and informative developments. But when they begin to reflect the more general mood (and moreover, the willingness to act) of the public and its elected representatives, the implications for public education are profound.

New Approaches to Governing America's Schools

"The right structure does not guarantee results. But the wrong structure aborts results and smothers even the best-directed efforts." This quotation is from Peter Drucker in *Managing for Results*, and increasing numbers of people concerned with education reform are recognizing its applicability to the education enterprise. Calls for a new look at the way America's schools are governed are prompted by dissatisfaction (as noted above) with the progress of current improvement efforts, by the public's increasing distaste for bureaucracy and, more broadly, by the powerful appeal of "devolution" and decentralization — that is, in the case of education, returning control over education decisions and resources to the people closest to students. But, most of all, the concerns about governance are a product of the failure of many of America's urban school districts — failure written in high dropout rates, in violence, in stunningly low student achievement. In this arena, unfortunately, there is room for outrage.

In their most public form, the calls for change are coming from foundations and businesses that have invested heavily in education reform initiatives, as well as from community organizations and policymakers — particularly state legislators — who find that their patience is wearing thin. But in off-the-record conversations, the calls come also from frustrated superintendents, reform leaders and other educators who feel stymied by bureaucratic controls and — to an even greater extent — by the tangled web of competing adult interests that they see as superseding the interests of children.

The dominant education governance structure in this country is hierarchical and bureaucratic, designed to resist change and promote stability — usually excellent attributes for important social institutions. Ironically, it may be public education's ability to resist change and maintain stability that will prove to be its undoing. Surviving the shift from a manufacturing-based economy to an information — and service-based one requires

that organizations, even public institutions, be flexible and adaptable. Over many decades, our education system did pretty much exactly what we designed it to do. The question now is whether it can change sufficiently to respond to new demands.

Governance debates are always tough because they inevitably raise fundamental questions about who is in charge, who makes the rules, who gets to decide, who represents "the public." The debates are also colored, *as they should be,* by the recognition that a change in governance structure does not in itself change anything that goes on in a classroom between a teacher and student. Governance reform, even if necessary, cannot be sufficient to improve education.

Further complicating this whole picture is the question of whether the needed new models even exist within education. Advocates of a broad review of governance are insisting that we must be willing to look beyond education and even beyond the public sector for approaches to organization and management that could be promising if tailored to support teaching and learning.

This is not just talk. Growing frustration over the performance of inner-city schools has spawned a variety of attempts to introduce new, and sometimes radical, approaches to how urban districts are organized and managed. They include initiatives to break urban systems into smaller units (Los Angeles, New York City, Albuquerque, Las Vegas); to privatize district operations (Baltimore, Hartford, Milwaukee); to redesign and/or privatize top district management (Minneapolis, Chicago); and to establish private-school voucher programs (Milwaukee, Cleveland, Puerto Rico). Perhaps the most compelling sign of the level of frustration has been the state takeover of urban districts in New Jersey (Newark, Jersey City, Paterson), Ohio (Cleveland), New York (Roosevelt), Rhode Island (Central Falls), Pennsylvania (Chester) and Illinois (East St. Louis).

The path ahead essentially is unmarked. Those who walk it will encounter brambles and potholes and even fierce creatures. They will perhaps long for the comfort of familiar landmarks. They will write home with stories of warring tribes and unforeseen adventures. But they also may discover new vistas and better routes to the destination that we seek.

Demands for Performance

One of the inescapable realities of public education's future is the continuing and escalating competition for resources, as the demands for prisons and health care continue to rise and the public remains convinced that it is overtaxed. Beyond those forces, there is the growing antipathy to government bureaucracy — an antipathy not to government programs and services but rather to waste and inefficiency. This public mood has led to the streamlining, overhaul and even privatization of a number of government activities, and it is unlikely that this trend will come to a precipitous halt within the next decade.

Companion to resource constraint is a sharply rising demand for performance and accountability. Seen more and more frequently are proposals for performance indicators, performance measures and performance funding applied to the public sector generally and education in particular.

A vulnerable target for overhaul fever is the country's higher education system, particularly — though not exclusively — the large public universities. With increasing frequency, those institutions have come under attack, first by the media and more recently by state policymakers, for their alleged indifference both to undergraduate students and to public priorities, even as they are seen as feathering their own institutional nests. As a consequence of the interest in accountability, coupled with the sense that higher education has heretofore escaped scrutiny, 14 states are developing or implementing a variety of proposals for performance-based funding of higher education. In a few places, governors and legislators have initiated reviews of the organization and performance of their states' postsecondary education system.

With the strengthening momentum toward a more performance-based education system, policymakers and education leaders alike are faced with two serious challenges. First, there is a continuing need for solid evidence about *what works* and what does not work in improving student achievement. With billions of public dollars at stake (not to mention the future of America's young people and the competitiveness of the American workforce), there are mounting calls for rigorous efforts to identify best practices in education, bringing better data to bear on decisions about where to invest resources for best effects on the quality of learning. Beyond the benchmarking of best practices, there remains an urgent need for other varieties of research that will support intelligent policymaking and resource allocation.

The second challenge involves application of intellectual skill and political will to the task of changing the incentive structures operating in the education system at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Educators and their leaders, by and large, are intelligent and committed people who, by and large, respond quite astutely to incentives provided by the system. A careful examination of existing incentives (or, alas, even a cursory one) likely will lead to the observation that the public is getting pretty much what the public is paying for — and that the incentives for the kinds of performance we *say* we would like to see are in reality often weak or nonexistent. As one major state university system leader recently said, "We attend to what you pay, not what you say."

If the public objective is for all elementary schools to ensure that 4th graders read at grade level, then it has to *matter* that such performance is achieved. If the public wants to see greater attention paid to quality in undergraduate education, then there should be incentives for that work and rewards for

institutions that do it well. Should the system's incentives ever be brought consistently into alignment with the rhetoric of value placed on learning, the effect on the performance of schools, colleges and universities may be very powerful indeed.

The Declining Public for Public Education

Public concern about the quality of education is at an all-time high. But what was once a whimper of dissatisfaction is quickly becoming a roar of discontent.

In a national poll conducted after the November 1996 election, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) found that more and more people agree schools need major improvements to serve children well. But it is also true that an increasing number of people believe the current public education system cannot and will not make the necessary changes. As a result, they are willing to consider alternatives to the public schools. And people willing to look at these options cut across political parties and ideologies, ethnic groups, ages, income and education levels.

More than half the voters surveyed in the ECS poll favor a major overhaul of public schools or believe the time has come to look outside the public system to improve the quality of education. Specifically, 27% believe that "only a top-to-bottom overhaul of our public schools will improve the quality of education," while another 27% — a surprisingly large number — believe "public schools have failed to meet students' needs" and that new approaches, such as home schooling and vouchers for private and parochial schools, should be given a chance.

These ECS poll results confirm recent findings by other organizations. In a 1995 study conducted for the Kettering Foundation, the Harwood Group concluded that "Americans are more than halfway out the schoolhouse door." The study involved asking citizens across the country whether they would prefer the public schools as they presently are to private schools; the strong response was that people would take their children out of public schools if they had the option.

Given the growing evidence of the public's disconnection from its education system, and the growing worry about the implications of declining public support, concerned people have begun to come forth with reminders about the value of common schools and their role in American democracy. An example is a 1996 publication from the Center on National Education Policy and Phi Delta Kappa. Entitled, *Do We Still Need Public Schools?*, the document points to the following functions of a system of publicly supported schools:

- To prepare people to become responsible citizens
- To improve social conditions
- To promote cultural unity
- To help people become economically self-sufficient

- To enhance individual happiness and enrich individual lives
- To dispel inequities in education
- To ensure a basic level of quality among schools.

Urging Americans to recommit to the concern for the common good that was at the heart of the founding of public education, the document also quotes education philosopher John Dewey: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy."

The discussion about schools and their connection to communities is taken up in a little book with a powerful title — *Is There a Public for Public Schools?*, by David Mathews, president of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. Mathews argues that the public felt an allegiance to its schools when it believed schools acted as agents in the achievement of ends *the public* believed were important. Currently, he asserts, the relationship between schools and communities is greatly in need of repair. In fact, "there may be so few people supportive of the idea of public schools — so small a community for these inherently community institutions — that school reform may need to be recast as community building. The success of reform efforts, and even the survival of the public system, may rest on an all-out effort to build a new compact between the public and its schools."

Given the trend many recent surveys and focus groups document, it is highly unlikely that public interest in the quality of education soon will fade. Rather, it appears that citizens are on the brink of finding ways to leave a public system that seems unable to respond to their needs and interests. It is quite possible that the direction education takes in this country will be determined by how seriously educators and policymakers consider what the public is telling them, how quickly and boldly leaders respond, and how genuine a partnership leaders are willing to forge with the public to find solutions.

The message from the public — "schools must change" — is compelling. The question the public is asking — "but can they?" — must be answered now by the public education system, or people will find the answers they are looking for elsewhere.

The Changing Nature of "The Learner"

A number of the forces discussed above — and others as well — converge to produce a wholly new definition of *the learner.*

No longer do we think just of students ages 5 through 21. The age span of learners is from birth through an entire lifetime, with especially critical periods during the earliest years and greatly increased time for learning (and teaching) in the "post-retirement" period.

Similarly, we expand our understanding of the potential locations for learning — from the crib to the child-care center, from the classroom to the living room, the museum or the Internet cafe, the workplace and cyberspace.

And we see a changing relationship between learner and "teacher," as learning becomes less and less a matter of receiving knowledge dispensed by an individual physically present. More and more, that teacher is a coach, a facilitator, a mentor and a fellow learner. As well, learning results from electronic interaction with material and/or other people, both experts and novices, close at hand or at a distance.

Within this changing environment, the educational needs and objectives of the learner also vary dramatically. Would-be learners include the academically disadvantaged and the academically advanced; the novice, the apprentice, the expert; the first-time college student, the returning student, the "reverse transfer" student; the pre-professional and the inservice professional; the very young and the "highly experienced."

The education system, now and in the future, must take into account these changes and more, including some not yet imagined.

* * * * * * *

And so, a number of forces with the potential to significantly affect the course of education improvement efforts — and even the future of public education — provide both context and challenge for ECS' work. Within that context, what are the priorities for the work of this interstate Compact for Education?

ECS PRIORITIES

The priorities set forth below reflect the ECS focus on work to promote improvement in public education and to anticipate important developments affecting the education system. They also affirm the organization's commitment to provide high-quality, useful information and assistance to state education policymakers. An array of ongoing ECS activities will continue to support and extend this work.

Work With States

- Support continuing initiatives by ECS leaders to build political and public support for education improvement, promote a revitalized bipartisan agenda and expand gubernatorial leadership for this work.

- Under the leadership of 1997-98 ECS Chairman Terry E. Branstad, governor of Iowa, support an initiative on *Harnessing Technology to Improve Teaching and Learning*, focusing on the preparation of educators and the uses of technology in effective teaching.

- Launch a new ECS initiative on *Governing America's Schools*, producing research on current and alternative governance models, documenting the effects of governance on student achievement, supporting deliberations of a National Commission, identifying key principles of effective governance, and, ultimately, offering technical assistance to states where there is interest in governance innovation.

- Pursue development of the Alliance for Best Practices in Education, an ECS partnership with the American Productivity and Quality Center, to undertake consortium benchmarking studies aimed at identifying and sharing best practices in education policy.

- Help states create the capacity to focus resources on those policies and programs effective in promoting higher levels of learning.

- In partnership with selected states and communities, actively pursue policy changes that will promote the scale up of K-12 education reform by creating operating environments supportive of innovative, high-performance schools. Major continuing projects will include:

  - The ECS/Annenberg project, in partnership with New American Schools

  - The State Leadership for Learning initiative.

- Work directly with networks of states at the forefront in advancing innovations in higher education — particularly those related to access, financing, performance assessment and accountability, uses of technology, and connecting learning and work

- Initiate a new phase of ECS work on teacher education reform, helping states develop a performance-oriented approach to teacher preparation and licensing.

Supporting Projects

- Focus K-12 policy research, analysis and development efforts on issues crucial to the success and scale up of education reform: resource reallocation; standards implementation issues, including assessment, accountability and the professional development of educators; and the array of policies that promote flexibility and diversity in the education system, providing more choices for parents and students.

- Work with policymakers, subject-matter experts and other interested groups to build awareness of the implications of emerging brain research for education policy and practice and to begin consideration of potential state policy recommendations.

- In tandem with policy work, address with state leaders the strategic and political issues involved in major transformation of the education system: promoting civil dialogue (public engagement); redesigning the roles of school districts and state departments; rethinking the nature and potential contribution of collective bargaining; and increasing the system's capacity for providing technical assistance and support to restructuring schools.

- Create the forces necessary to promote transformation of the higher education system, with emphasis on strengthening the role of community colleges, connecting learning and work, promoting K-16 linkages and addressing related high-priority states issues such as cost, quality and accountability.

- Continue work on Georgia Governor Zell Miller's initiative, *Investing in Student Achievement,* marshaling information for state policymakers on ways to redirect public resources toward policies and programs that produce demonstrable improvements in student achievement.

- Strengthen ECS efforts, both independent and collaborative, to collect and share evidence regarding both the performance of restructured schools, colleges, and universities, and the impact of policy on that performance.

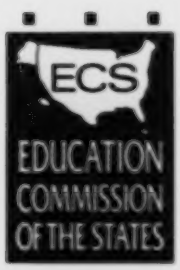
- Continue and expand ECS initiatives to help states and districts identify and use a variety of approaches to strengthen public engagement in education and reform.

Copies of this book are available free from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427, 303-299-3692. Ask for Publication No. GP-97-1.

© Copyright 1997 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide compact of states and territories formed in 1965 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education. The ECS office is located at 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427; telephone 303-299-3600; FAX 303-296-8332; e-mail ecs@ecs.org; http://www.ecs.org.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, Colorado 80202-3427
303-299-3600
FAX: 303-296-8332
e-mail: ecs@ecs.org
http://www.ecs.org